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## THE FEMALE-IMPERSONATOR

By RALPH WERTHER-JENNIE JUNE

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*He* or *she*—for we are dealing with an individual who ordinarily passed for a youth, but who, when plying his avocation, one would be apt to identify with the gentle sex—was the victim of heredity. Present-day society frowns upon the female-impersonator because of the opinion that any young man adopting the rôle must do so as the result of moral obliquity. But it is not generally known that female-impersonation is usually a matter of instinct, and as it is a phenomenon of human life which causes no detriment to any one, it lies outside the province of ethics.

Whoever has witnessed a performance by one of these lowly, unadvertised impersonators who from time to time entertain the patrons of the more modest cabarets of our large cities, must confess that they are *born* actors, or "actresses," by which latter term they are commonly referred to in their own circles. Their remarkable histrionic skill is not primarily the result of practice or instruction. Nor did they—to go to the bottom of things—voluntarily select their profession. They are a species of human sport (in the biological sense), just as a red buttercup is a botanical sport.

The instinctive female-impersonators have a just claim to membership in both sexes. Or rather they are a curious fusion of three human elements ordinarily appearing each in a single individual—one-third man, one-third woman, and one-third infant. While fundamentally man physically, the contour of their bodies is feminesque. Further, their skin is remarkably soft and comparatively hairless. They are of slight build, and their muscular system is inefficient, as in the typical woman. The hair of their heads is literally as fine as silk. One never encounters it so fine and soft in the typical man.

In character they are completely women, having a fondness for the occupations, diversions, and vanities of the latter, and a corresponding shrinking from the interests of the typical man. As to their

infantilism, the form of face and head is often that of a baby, and they enjoy perennial youth. That is, one of these instinctive female-impersonators—or androgynes, as the medical world calls them—at the age of forty looks to be twenty. At forty, further, they have still a childlike way of doing things, and their faces wear expressions ordinarily seen only on the countenances of small children.

Their audiences have often marvelled because the impersonators' faces are devoid of any sign of beardal hair, and have concluded that by a freak of Nature, these human sports are beardless. This is rarely the case. Usually the face is depilated. The beardal hair is allowed to grow for a full week, during which period the impersonator relinquishes his profession because of his untidy appearance. By means of depilatory wax he then pulls out every hair by the roots. For three weeks subsequently, the impersonator's face is as devoid of hair as a baby's, when the cycle has to be repeated.

"Jennie June"—as the particular impersonator with whom we are concerned was known professionally—was in the heyday of his career in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Some readers may recall him. It might be of interest to look in on a typical 24 hours of the life of a lowly female-impersonator as passed south of 14th Street, New York, about the middle of the decade pointed out.

It should be explained that all these female-impersonators adopt a feminine sobriquet. For example, three of them bore respectively the names, Jersey Lily, Grace Darling, and Annie Laurie. But often they adopt the names of star actresses, and even drag these noted names into the mud, because most of these lowly impersonators do not give a rap for their own reputations.

At the particular period under scrutiny, June made his home with a young ruffian by the name of "Mike," because there had developed in himself an especially strong affection for the latter. Although Mike mulcted June out of a large share of his earnings, and habitually treated him in the most heartless manner, he continued for months to hold first place among June's friends.

As neither of the pals got to bed usually until around three in the morning, their day did not begin until noon. Then June would prepare breakfast for the two. As usual, Mike was almost penniless. He had no inclination to work, and what needs he could not supply from the fruits of crap-shooting and other gambling, he depended on June to supply. As they sit together at their tiny breakfast table, he is occupied with bombarding his pal for cash.

"Hand out another dollar, or I'll have you locked up!"

"Mike, you ought not to hit me like that; if for no other reason, because I'm a girl. A fellow ought to be ashamed to hit a girl."

"You're no girl! You're only a damned thing!"

"How often have I told you, Mike, that I do not claim to be a complete girl. I merely have a girl's mind and a girl's breasts, and body otherwise is much like a girl's. I am a girl incarnated in the body of a boy."

"How did you ever come to be a female-impersonator?"

"Because I could get nothing else to do. While studying at Blank College to fit myself for a teacher, I stooped to impersonation only one evening a week, partly for the money there was in it. But female-impersonation was for me the highest joy of life. I, however, regarded it as something to be ashamed of, and hid it from the college community. But the faculty, through an accident, finally discovered it and immediately expelled me. As I could not tell prospective employers that I had ever attended college, and had difficulty with references, I was unable to find a job for which my education fitted me. I thus had to turn what was only an occasional diversion into a steady occupation."

The breakfast things cleared away, the two pals separated, not to meet again until bedtime. Mike started out for a gambling "joint," while June spent the afternoon in the Astor Library—near which he resided—finding there, almost every day, food for his strong intellectual instincts.

For his evening meal, June visited a restaurant, and dined alone. Particularly while eating all by himself, he became melancholy: "To think of what I have come to! My ambition since childhood to win an honored place in the world of culture utterly shipwrecked! To think of being doomed to pass my life in the most dreary and desolate districts of New York!" Tears trickle from the corners of his eyes down and into his mouth, seasoning the food that he chews mechanically.

"But I am grateful to Providence that it is my fate, rather than that of one of my brothers or sisters, to pass man's allotted stay on earth as an outcast from society! And it is comforting to realize that none of my dear ones up in the Connecticut hills has any knowledge of what fate had in store for me, who was always looked upon there as the most pious and pure-minded boy of the community.

"In suffering my fate, I am doubtless paying the penalty to God for the profligacy of some ancestor. I have been appointed by the God who visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to live out the rest of my life in mourning and paroxysms of grief!"

The instinctive female-impersonators are in general the most inclined toward melancholy of all classes of society. Not really belonging to either of the sexes, and for this reason despised and persecuted by the normally sexed, these androgynous unfortunates are the most discontented with life of all elements of society—that is, with life as Nature and their fellow humans mete it out to them. Suicide is by far more frequent per thousand among them than among any other class of mankind.

But the ordeal of dinner finally finished, June returns to his rooms, and prepares for his usual night's program. He removes his outer clothing, adjusts a woman's wig to his head, touches up eyebrows with a stick of charcoal and cheeks with rouge, and applies padding here and there to his body. Lastly an evening dress designed for a member of the gentle sex is put on and carefully adjusted. Pinning a picture hat in his false hair, and throwing a cloak around him that almost conceals his gown, he makes the trip to the low-class cabaret which is first on his schedule for that night.

It is soon his turn to occupy the center of the large, gaudily decorated, and elaborately lighted hall. With the exception of this space left free in the center for the exhibiting artists and for dancing, the hall is filled with small tables, around which are gathered numerous smartly dressed members of the gentle sex with their escorts, as well as many rather poorly clad and uncouth laboring men, who have dropped in the cabaret to find a little recreation after their wearisome day. All of "Jennie June's" audience are from time to time sipping their favorite beverages, while the men take an occasional puff at their cigars, and some of the women, at cigarettes. The place is paradise for the *genre* of human.

"Jennie June," now the center of all eyes, becomes oblivious to the dark side of life that habitually weighed upon him when his mind was not occupied with his studies or with his avocation of impersonator. He is now conscious only of the joy of being alive and the center of an admiring group. The transformation from his usual rôle of a youth to the short-lived rôle of a girl was like drinking a stimulant to a dipsomaniac. Another personality seemed to have taken possession of him. He felt that he had temporarily relinquished his mind and body to the dictates of another spirit—that animating the cry-baby species of mademoiselle. It was a spirit not alien to him. It was a spirit which had dwelt in his brain from infancy.

He first renders, all alone, a dialogue between a young couple, alternately adopting his natural rather hoarse voice and male intonations, and then imitating the response of the individual of the fair sex in a bland, sentimental, and caressing voice, which, while funda-

mentally baritone, nevertheless possessed a decidedly feminine timbre.

His next number is a monologue, as of one of the cry-baby species of women, depicting her views of life, particularly her estimate of the sterner sex.

For his last number, he impersonates a prima donna, as she struts about the operatic stage, and renders several selections in falsetto, more like an alto than a soprano.

To all, his audience listens attentively. They marvel at the close resemblance of his poses, intonations, and general appearance to the same things in a young woman. They repeatedly applaud, and as he makes his final bow, quarters and dimes roll to his feet over the floor from every direction—the tribute from those who had decidedly enjoyed his female-impersonation.

After this scene had been repeated at several cabarets, June, long after midnight, turns his steps towards home. He shrinks from the returning thither, because his pal's heartlessness had thoroughly poisoned his home life. Primarily for this reason, he spent as little time as possible there.

But before being able to forget, through sleep, the hardships of life, he tossed about for two hours. Among other worries was that his pal had not yet returned. Some misfortune must have overtaken him, as he was a reckless character and likely any night to fall into the toils of the police, or occupy a cot at Bellevue Hospital. June felt that every moment he would lose his mind, and repeatedly besought the All-seeing One to allay his excitement. His manner of life was hard on the nerves.

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## KLEPTOLAGNIA OR SEXUAL KLEPTOMANIA

By Havelock Ellis

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By kleptolagnia is meant theft associated with sexual excitement, or sexual "kleptomania." The question is thus at once raised whether it is to be regarded as a subordinate variety of kleptomania. This further leads to the inquiry as to what kleptomania is, a long-debated psychiatric and medico-legal question. The subject of kleptolagnia is thus of considerable practical as well as psychological interest, and it is desirable to attempt in some degree to clear up its nature and position.

The history of kleptomania begins in the eighteenth century.[1]

[1] It has been summarized by Juquelier and Vinchon, "Histoire de la Kleptomanie," *Revue de Psychiatrie*, February, 1914.